

Committee on House Administration  
Hearing on  
Challenges and Opportunities in 2012 Elections  
1310 Longworth House Office Building  
Thursday, March 31, 2011  
10:30 am

Statement of  
The Honorable Susan A. Gill, CERA  
Supervisor of Elections, Citrus County, Florida

Chairman Lungren, Ranking Member Brady, members of the committee and a special hello to my Congressman Rich Nugent of the Fifth Congressional District in the State of Florida, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing on **“The 2010 Election: A Look Back At What Went Right and Wrong.”** The Fifth Congressional district is home to more veterans than any other congressional district in the nation. We are proud of our veterans and we honor them. Our small Citrus County City of Inverness was named the most patriotic city in the United States by the 40&8 veterans organization. Every November 11th we have a wonderful Veterans Day Parade to honor our veterans.

First, I would like to thank Congress for the Help America Vote Act. We were able to use the grants to provide voting equipment for people with disabilities, enhance our voter education programs and provide additional tools for poll worker training. All the grants were greatly appreciated and we will certainly miss them.

A major concern at every level of government whether it is local, state or federal is the budget. This is extremely difficult for election officials as we enter the 2012 presidential election cycle.

Shrinking budgets can cause serious problems in the conduct of elections. A March 22<sup>nd</sup> article in the *Fresno Bee* entitled **“Report: Blame budget cuts for Nov. 2 election snags”** reports on the November 2010 election and problems caused by slashed budgets which in turn caused a reduction in services. For future elections the grand jury recommended that the county supervisors “should provide adequate funding to ensure the ability of the county clerk to maintain credible elections.” The article continues saying the funding for elections could get worse citing that for the budget hearings in June, county officials have asked department heads to prepare a budget with a 14% cut for the upcoming fiscal year. The article also reported that the County records indicate that the funding for the elections office is down 40% from what it was five years ago. Add the 40% plus the 14% and the Fresno clerk is being asked to conduct a presidential election with 54% less funding than 5 years ago.

I am not singling out Fresno. California is a bellwether state and we look to California to see what is in store for the rest of us, both good and bad. The problems Fresno encountered will be played out in many other jurisdictions throughout the nation. In many

cases, we are at the end of the line in “doing more with less”. We are charged with conserving tax dollars. We must ask the public to understand that there will be reductions in the conveniences and services provided by our government or there will have to be tax increases that nobody wants.

The Election Center has been warning state and local governments since the summer of 2010 that lack of funding is likely to affect elections all throughout America. And elections organizations at the state and national level have begun the process of thinking through how budget cuts are likely to affect voters in 2012. We have to be aware that we cannot deliver the same kinds of voter services with cuts of 20 percent or 50 percent of local election budgets and expect that things will operate like they would at full funding. Expectations of policy holders, funding authorities and stakeholders need to be realistic in the reality of state and local governments facing financial difficulties.

Florida election officials have experienced voting systems challenges where many counties utilized three different voting systems in the last decade. The aftermath of the 2000 election caused the Florida legislature to ban the further use of punch card election equipment. Several counties in Florida purchased touch screen equipment because of the flexibility for multi-language, as well as accommodating people with disabilities. In 2007 when former Governor Charlie Crist assumed office, one of his first acts was to encourage the legislature to ban the use of touch screen voting equipment in the State of Florida. While I am not here to debate the merits or deficiencies of touch screen voting equipment, I will tell you that it has been an extremely expensive proposition for the counties that first had punch cards, then went to touch screens and then optical scan voting equipment all in one decade. Counties are still paying the bill.

Florida had a smooth 2010 election cycle. I will say that the major issue in the 2010 Florida election, however, was late reporting of results. Candidates, the media, the public are all demanding immediate results and have no tolerance for having to wait. In 2010, Governor Scott edged out former Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink by 1%. The results were not certain until the next day. Palm Beach County did not have the necessary equipment enhancements to have the results uploaded as fast as the public, candidates and media demanded. This was highly criticized. The speed of reporting has become an important indicator of the success of elections. No one wants to wait. As an election professional, I have to say to you that once voters have completed voting, that “accuracy” of counting those votes has to be more important than speed. Timeliness is important but cannot outweigh reporting accurate results.

On the plus side, voter confidence and voter satisfaction with the process has greatly increased in Florida and the nation as a whole. As the following graphic shows, voter confidence is at the highest level ever recorded. Voters can now vote early up to 15 days prior to Election Day, they can vote by mail or vote on Election Day. In the Citrus County 2008 presidential election, 61% of the people who voted cast their ballot prior to Election Day. The voters love the convenience. As election officials, we like the process because it provides us a better opportunity to serve the voter. Voters mailing their ballot

means they do not have to go to a polling place or if they vote at an early vote site they are never in the wrong precinct. Simple.

For this reason, we are exploring the concept of Vote Centers in Florida. Congressman Rokita knows all about the Vote Center concept as does Secretary of State Scott Gessler. I am co-chair of a Task Force in Florida formed by our Florida Association of Supervisors of Elections to study the concept with the goal of convincing the Florida Legislature to allow vote centers. We are looking at two things; the convenience to voters and the cost savings after initial investment to the jurisdictions. We are using Indiana and Colorado as models.

We are in a different time now where our society is very mobile. The traditional polling place, which was staffed by poll workers from the neighborhood, is not the model that works today. Most voters want the flexibility to vote at a location and time that fits in to their schedule. We think that vote centers are the answer.

In Florida, photo identification has been a requirement since 1998. I have to admit that at the beginning election officials thought this was going to be a big problem. It turned out not to be a problem at all. Our law allows for a variety of photo identifications and also allows that a voter who does not have photo identification may complete a provisional ballot. The signature on the provisional ballot envelope is matched with the signature on file, if it matches, their vote counts.

Some states do not see a reason to require photo identification. To them, it seems unnecessary. Some states conduct mail ballot elections like Oregon. There are states that conduct open primary elections and others conduct closed primary elections. This fact does not make one state right and the other wrong. The individuality of the states must be preserved.

Redistricting takes place in 2012 and places additional challenges on election officials both financial and logistic. While redistricting takes place every 10 years, redistricting in a presidential election year takes place only once every 20 years. The redistricting timeline for Florida has the state legislature meeting for 60 days ending March 9, 2012. The redistricting plan then goes to the Attorney General where 15 days is allotted for approval before it is onto the Florida Supreme Court, where the court has 30 days before sending the plan along to the Department of Justice. The Justice Department has 60 days for approval of the plan. If each approval along the way takes the full time allotted, Florida will be right on top of the federal and state qualifying deadline. We sincerely hope that there are no delays. If the process is held up by lawsuits or other delays, we are in danger of not meeting the overseas ballot mailing deadline of July 13<sup>th</sup>. We would have to mail advance ballots to give the overseas voters an opportunity to vote and then follow up with a regular ballot after the final redistricting decisions are made. This historically is very confusing for the voter and expensive for the counties.

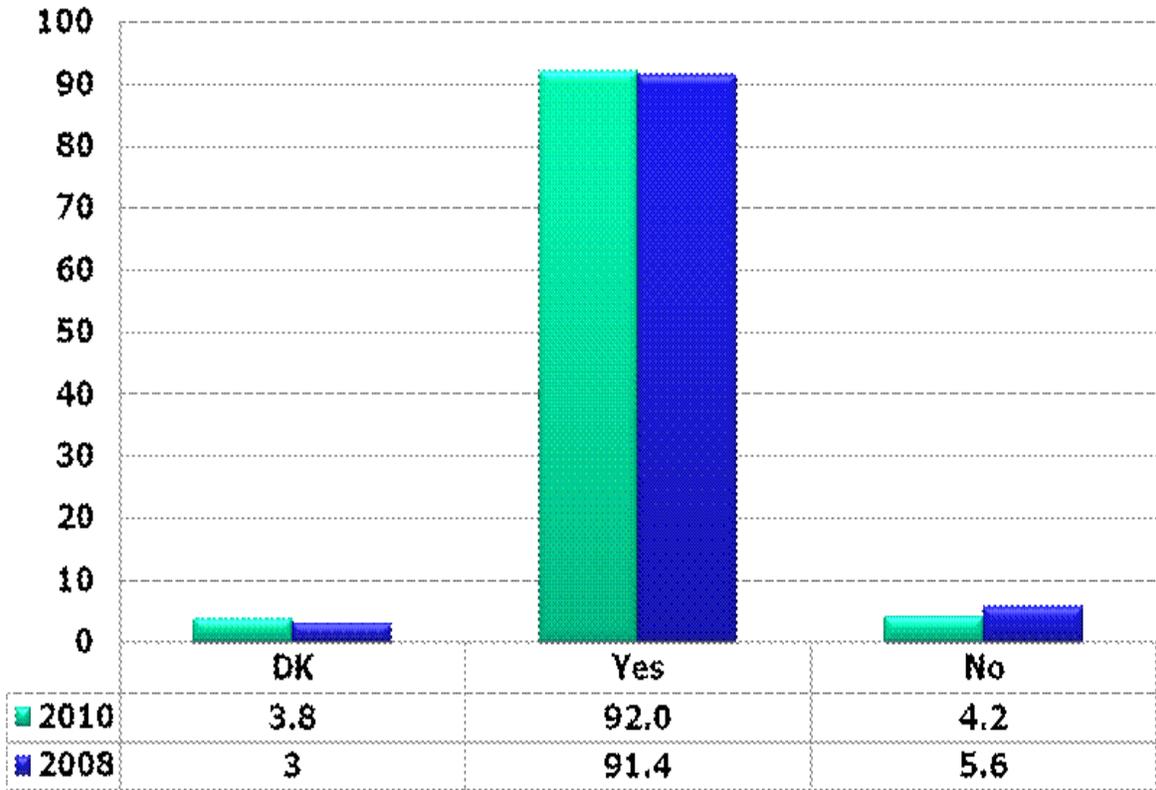
Uncertainty in the election world is not good. Conducting elections is all about planning. We need to know dates of elections and the districts candidates are running in to

complete the tasks of ballot layout, precinct changes, notification to voters, mailing ballots to overseas voters, poll worker training, equipment management and the long list of other election responsibilities. We need time to notify voters in a timely manner of the many changes a redistricting year and shrinking budgets will cause.

Elections have come a long way since the 2000 presidential election. Federal, state, and local officials have worked hard to correct election administration and election voting issues. Improvements will constantly be needed as we go forward. Our wonderful nation is made up of 50 states with varying personalities. It is like a family where no two children are exactly the same. What works in the State of Florida may not work well in another state. The states do not need to be micro-managed. The Help America Vote Act provided the continuity we needed on the national level but left the states to devise how best to serve their voters. HAVA was unique among Federal laws in that it actually engaged in a “trusted partner” relationship of letting state governments structure election processes that best served their voters. And, this is how it should be. We at the state and local levels know more about our voters and how best to accommodate their needs than Federal regulations which try to force uniformity.

In conclusion, we have made great progress since the 2000 election. The progress in conducting fair, honest and accurate elections comes at a price. My hope is that a reduction in funding for elections does not cause issues in the upcoming 2012 elections. My fear is the cutting of funds at the state and federal level end up in the laps of the local governments. We cannot afford to have the voter confidence gained over the years eroded. Citizens must have confidence in their election process. Elections are the backbone of democracy. I assure you that election officials are dedicated to the integrity of the election process and will work tirelessly to preserve the process to the best of our abilities with the resources provided. Thank you for the honor and opportunity to address this committee.

**THINKING ONLY ABOUT THE ACT OF VOTING, NOT THE CANDIDATES OR THE PARTIES, DO YOU HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT YOUR VOTE WAS COUNTED FAIRLY AND ACCURATELY?**



Source: The Election Center, 12543 Westella, Suite 100, Houston, TX 77077: a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to improve the administration of democracy in America. © 2011 – The Election Center, Houston, TX.

This was from a national survey by The Election Center, Houston, TX of 1400 valid voters (conducted after the election each year) in 2010 and 1058 voters in 2008 (nationwide in both instances) in a scientifically random sample of voters. Voter confidence is at an all-time high.